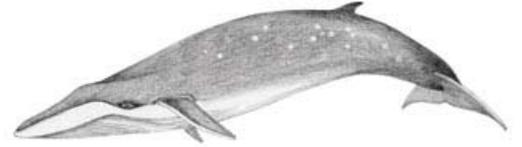




Sei Whale

Sei whales (*Balaenoptera borealis*) are found worldwide and migrate between high-latitude summer feeding grounds and low-latitude winter breeding grounds. In the eastern North Pacific, sei whales are found in the summer from California to the Gulf of Alaska, and in the winter from central California south to the equator.

General description: The body of the sei whale is dark and sleek with irregular white markings on the ventral side. The rostrum is pointed and holds up to 400 ashy-black baleen plates per side; each plate is up to 2.7 ft (0.8m) long. There are approximately 32-60 short ventral throat grooves most likely used in feeding. The flippers are short and slender whereas the dorsal fin, located two-thirds the distance between the head and tail, is sickle shaped and about 2 ft (0.6 m) tall. Often the dorsal fin is visible when the sei whale blows. The average adult male is 46 ft (14 m) in length and weighs about 14 tons. The average adult female is about 49 ft (15 m) long and weighs in at 17 tons. At birth, sei whale calves are 15 ft (4.5 m) long and weigh about 1 ton.



Food habits: Sei whales skim-feed on schools of planktonic crustaceans (mainly copepods but also amphipods and euphausiids). They also feed on small fish and squid. Daily dietary intake for a sei whale is estimated at 1 ton.

Life history: Sei whales reach sexual maturity by 10 years of age although adult size may not be attained until 25 years. Sei whales breed primarily in the winter months, and every 2-3 years mature females give birth to one calf after a gestation period of 11-12 months. The lactation period typically lasts from 6-9 months. Their life span is approximately 60 years.

Seasonal movements: Sei whales are migratory animals and believed to move between feeding and breeding grounds.

Behavior: Little is known about the social system of the sei whale. Typically, single animals and groups of 2-5 individuals are seen traveling together. Thousands of sei whales have been observed together, often during migration, apparently in part due to abundant food resources. Norwegian scientists have dubbed these episodes "invasions". Sei whales are among the fastest swimming baleen whales, reaching speeds of 20 knots. Despite their speed, sei whales are not known for their diving abilities. Submergence times are typically 5-10 minutes in shallow waters.

Population size: The population size of sei whales is poorly understood, and there have been no direct estimates of sei whale abundance in the North Pacific based on visual surveys. Pre-whaling abundance was estimated at 58,000-62,000 in the North Pacific, and the population was reduced to 7,260 – 12,620 by 1974. By 1977, abundance was predicted to be 42,000. There is no current population estimate for North Pacific sei whales.

Predators, hunting, and other mortality: There are no known fisheries interactions with sei whales. Reported take by commercial whalers totaled 61,500 between 1947 and 1987. Since 1976, the International Whaling Commission has prohibited taking of sei whales. Likewise, the U.S. has prohibited commercial whaling since 1972. Sei whales are formally listed as "endangered" under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 and depleted/strategic under the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972.

Text: Cheryl A. Clark